

A Guide to the Memphis Landmarks Commission
Design Review Process
Revised June 2002

Enacted by a City ordinance, the purpose of the Memphis Landmarks Commission is 1) to promote the educational and cultural welfare of the people of Memphis, 2) to preserve and protect the historic and architectural value of significant resources, 3) to ensure compatibility and create an aesthetic atmosphere within local historic districts, 4) to foster civic beauty and community pride, 5) to stabilize and improve property values and to strengthen the local economy, and 6) to enhance the city's attractions to tourists and visitors.

The Memphis Landmarks Commission is a part of the Division of Planning and Development of the City of Memphis. Appointed by the Mayor, the Commission itself is a nine-member board of citizens. Supporting the Commission is the staff who run the Landmarks office, work with applicants and make recommendations to the Commission. The process for receiving a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) takes about 30 days from the time of submitting a complete application to receiving approval from the Commission. *

What is the process?

1. Early on, call the Landmarks staff at 576-7191 to discuss your project. We will fax or mail you an application form and a meeting schedule.
2. Together with your architect, designer or contractor, become familiar with the historic district and its buildings as you prepare your design. Refer to your neighborhood's design guidelines while developing your plans. A set of the district design guidelines is available upon request. We recommend meeting with staff to receive preliminary feedback; staff will suggest changes to the plans that may be necessary for the work to meet the design guidelines.
3. Submit a complete application (including a site plan, measured drawings of elevations, and floor plans) to staff by the appropriate deadline. (See the Landmarks Commission application deadline and meeting schedule for exact dates.) Gather samples of proposed materials (brick, mortar, etc.) which must be presented for Commission approval at the Commission meeting. Faxed applications will be accepted for the purpose of meeting the application deadline, but the original application and other materials must be received within three business days for the project to remain on the upcoming agenda. Requests to demolish a structure have other specific guidelines and requirements. See Fact Sheet #10 and consult Landmarks staff for further assistance.
4. Upon receipt of the application, staff may recommend that the Landmarks Commission's Design Review Committee review the project. The Design Review Committee meets on the second Wednesday of the month, at 4:30 P.M. in City Hall, 125 N. Main St., Room 403. The applicant, architect and contractor are advised to be present at this meeting.

Staff will notify the applicant, architect and contractor of the committee meeting agenda by telephone or fax in advance of the Design Review Committee meeting.

5. At the Design Review Committee meeting, the committee members will review the proposal in regards to the district design guidelines, and will make suggestions for changes, if necessary, to bring the project into compliance with the design review guidelines.
6. Staff will prepare a report of the Design Review Committee's recommendations and possible conditions of approval for presentation to the full Commission at the Commission's regularly scheduled monthly meeting. The Landmarks Commission generally meets on the fourth Wednesday of each month. Meetings are held at City Hall, 125 N. Main St., Room 403, beginning at 4:30 P.M. Staff will mail a copy of the meeting agenda and staff report to the applicant, architect and contractor the week prior to the meeting. Applicants must be present at the meeting for their proposal to be approved.
9. Following approval, staff will mail the applicant a COA, a copy of the COA to be submitted to the Office of Construction Code Enforcement, and a preservation permit, which must be validated by the Office of Construction Code Enforcement for projects requiring a building permit. The COA expires one year from the date of issue if a valid preservation permit has not been obtained.
10. The preservation permit must be posted in a front-facing window of the primary structure for the duration of construction. In the case of new house construction, the preservation permit need not be posted on-site. Projects are monitored by staff during construction to insure conformance with the approved plans.

* The Commission has delegated to staff the authority to approve minor projects and ones that are difficult to see from the street. Those projects can usually be reviewed in one week or less. Minor projects that may be approved by staff include but are not limited to:

- Rear yard fences on interior lots (as long as the fence is 6' or less, and connects to the middle or rear of the side façade(s) of the house)
- New driveway gates
- Truckpointing
- Minor new construction at the rear or side of a commercial building, such as fire escapes, loading docks, and paving
- OA renewals (as long as the project was not controversial when first approved by the Commission and there have been no significant changes to the plans)
- Garages and outbuildings where only the roof is visible or the building is located behind an existing fence
- Rear additions to houses on interior lots which are within the existing side wall planes and do not break the planes of the roof
- Miscellaneous small changes that have low significance to the overall property (e.g. security doors in HP districts)
- Minor landscaping elements in HP districts (e.g. low, short retaining walls)